



New breeding records of Verreaux's Eagle Owl *Buteo lacteus* in Bénin, West Africa

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Le Grand-duc de Verreaux *Buteo lacteus* est, en Afrique de l'Ouest, un résident peu abondant en habitat riverain: fréquent en Sénégal, mais rare, bien que peut-être passé inaperçu, au Mali, Ghana, Togo, Nigeria et Bénin. Peu de données concernant la reproduction sont disponibles dans la région. Au Bénin, l'auteur a observé une famille de quatre oiseaux dans la Forêt Classée de Wari Maro, en juin 1996, et un couple nichant sous les racines creuses d'un arbre dans la Ouémé à Bétérou, en février 1998. Deux œufs furent pondus à même le sable de la rivière, dans la cavité sous l'arbre. Malheureusement ceux-ci, ainsi qu'un des oiseaux, furent détruits par la suite.

Verreaux's Eagle Owl *Buteo lacteus* is a frequent and widespread resident in savannah and woodlands in east and southern Africa. In West Africa, however, the species is much scarcer and appears to be most frequent in riparian habitat. It is not uncommon in Senegambia, but is much more sporadic in its distribution in Mali, northern Ghana, Togo, Bénin and central Nigeria¹.

There are only two records from Ghana, where it has reputedly been overlooked⁶ and, similarly, there only two records from Togo, both in riparian habitat². Breeding has not been recorded in either country. It is an uncommon resident in Nigeria, although there are two breeding records^{1,3}.

The species has been recorded several times in Bénin. It is recorded as a year-round breeding resident in riparian habitat in Arli and Pendjari National Parks⁵, although the authors provide no data on breeding apart from stating that it had nested there. I recorded a family group of four birds in a dry riverbed in the Forêt Classée of Wari Maro (09°10'N 02°15'E) in central Bénin in June 1996.

The species is reported to use the remains of old nests of several different species⁴. I found a pair nesting under the hollowed-out roots of a tree in the River Ouémé at Bétérou (09°11'N 02°16'E) on 10 February 1998. Two eggs had been laid directly onto the clean river sand, in the cavity under the tree. Unfortunately

these were subsequently destroyed as was one of the birds, and I was unable to follow the nesting through to completion. However the species is probably more common here than was previously thought. From the records available, it appears to prefer riparian habitat in West Africa and this may make the species more difficult to observe, leading it to be overlooked. This breeding record is also of interest because of the general paucity of records for the whole area. ?

References

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